

Speaking Notes for Minister Humphreys T.D.,

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

**on the occasion of the 10th Annual Meeting of the European
Heads of Heritage Forum Dinner**

Castletown House, Celbridge, Co. Kildare

At 7.30pm, 21st May, 2015

**European Heritage Heads and delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests.**

Dia Daoibh agus fáilte romhat go hEireann, good evening and welcome to Ireland.

Opening Remarks

I am honoured as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to join you here this evening in the magnificent surroundings of Castletown House, one of Ireland's most important historic houses, on this special occasion - your 10th Anniversary. I would like to thank the EHHF Troika for this kind invitation to host this dinner. I won't speak too long as I am sure after a long day of fruitful discussions in Dublin Castle that you are all looking forward to a taste of our renowned Irish fare.

EHHF 10th Annual Meeting

It is apt that we are sitting here this evening in the Long Gallery, one of the most important interiors of eighteenth century Ireland, inspired as it was by the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum. It reminds us of our common European heritage and indeed why this informal network of national heritage heads and experts in the field of architecture, archaeology and landscape is extremely valuable. The objective of the EHHF— as an advocate of heritage and a collective voice for the recognition of heritage as a strategic resource for

Europe-is both welcome and challenging. Thanks to your active networking on a European level by the EHHF, the progressive mainstreaming of public heritage policies has become increasingly perceptible in recent years. You have both my admiration and my support for your endeavors.

The past ten years have witnessed significant milestones for the EHHF. Indeed, the gathering of representatives from more than twenty countries - every year for the past ten years - to exchange views on heritage alone is noteworthy. The creation of the standing committee - the European Heritage Legal Forum – is of enormous benefit in ensuring that early dissemination of information on the development and potential consequences of proposed legislation developed by the European Union, is conveyed to heritage authorities.

The second standing committee put in place - the Economic Taskforce - will ensure that EHHF members will be fully informed of the latest methods of collecting and monitoring socio-economic data of cultural heritage which will assist and no doubt complement the work and research of heritage authorities. I support this taskforce in its aims of working with European institutions to make heritage statistics available and which will help devise evidence-based policy.

Heritage-led Regeneration

The theme of this year's forum - Shaping the Future - Heritage Led Regeneration and Consolidation - particularly resonates with me. For me, regeneration is the process of reviving the social, cultural, economic and environmental life of an area. Cultural heritage provides a unique identity and backdrop to our lives and it is central to the creation of a high quality working and living environment. This magnificent house for example epitomises this approach – once the reserve of a privileged few, it has now been revitalised as not only a tourist attraction but as something that benefits the local community.

With the Irish State's population estimated to exceed 5 million by 2020, we have no choice but to plan a sustainable future particularly in terms of using and re-using heritage assets in all their different forms. Ireland had reacted to the challenges of re-using and adapting our historic fabric and I understand that you will hear about such exemplary projects tomorrow.

The importance of the role that built environment plays in sustainable development, economic recovery and jobs creation is now widely recognised. Regeneration requires an innovative and integrated approach which recognises the evolving needs of the area and its people now and into the future. It needs individuals such as you here this evening to identify this approach and create this vision.

As an aside, this concept of regeneration and sustainable development is of course not confined simply to built heritage. Next week I will be launching the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland which aims to manage our landscape in a considered, integrated and planned way in line with our responsibilities under the European Landscape Convention. This Strategy will set out specific measures to be implemented across all sectors which impact the landscape and will help us ensure that the landscapes of the future are as valued as the landscapes of the present and the past. Once again, sustainability is the key.

Innovative Fiscal Supports for the Historic Environment

I understand that earlier today you discussed many thematic issues including adaptive re-use, development and planning, fiscal supports and changing the perception of heritage. Management of the historic environment is not an enviable task. It needs commitment and communications between the right institutions and it requires considerable resources and investment. Bringing these two strands together at the same time is challenging given other policy priorities.

Ireland has been particularly heavily affected by the economic downturn. On a national level, we continue to promote cultural heritage as a pillar of sustainable development but it has been

challenging maintaining state investment in heritage when so many other vital services have been curtailed. Nevertheless, we have prioritised our heritage recognising what it brings to the Irish economy and Irelands global identity generally. Indeed, I have regularly acknowledged the importance such a culturally rich identity plays in the success of our tourism industry both at home and internationally. Cultural tourism is vital for attracting a particular market segment – the culturally curious tourist.

Given Ireland’s challenging situation, we have taken innovative approaches to develop fiscal supports for heritage and has taken cognisance of lessons learned throughout Europe. The government recently launched the Living City Initiative - a new urban regeneration incentive - which focuses on the regeneration of the historic centres of six cities in Ireland. By offering tax relief - for expenditure on the refurbishment or conversion of residential and commercial properties- this initiative - it is hoped – will bring life back into the heart of these cities where it is needed most.

My Department also recently concluded a pilot Historic Towns Initiative. The aim of this pilot was to harness the cultural heritage assets of Ireland’s historic towns; to stimulate regeneration and to stall and reverse the trend towards depopulation, loss of vibrancy, vacancy and dereliction which currently exists. With modest funding, the pilot’s preliminary conclusions show that a roll-out of this

initiative - on a national level - could bring substantial benefits in terms of the local economy, employment, social, environmental and cultural factors. It is clear that heritage-led regeneration can be an important tool in sustainable development.

With on-going pressure on public finances, it is evident that there is a need to leverage significant investment in the sustainable management and conservation of Europe's urban built heritage via a combination of EU fiscal incentives, structural funding, public investment and private sources. This investment has significant potential to further drive economic recovery and is in line with the objectives of Europe 2020 strategy.

Concluding Remarks

Before I conclude, I wish to thank all of you who have travelled to Ireland. Castletown was built to express the very best of this country and gives you an insight into the diversity of our heritage attractions. I do hope therefore that you will have an opportunity to further explore what Ireland has to offer.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the Office of Public Works for allowing us to use this splendid setting and also that of Dublin Castle and also Dublin City Council for the use of City Hall. I am grateful to Trinity College Dublin for facilitating a tour of its historic buildings that have been so innovatively re-used and adapted.

I wish to thank the secretariat to the EHHF, Ms. Benjamine Dobbelaere, for her efforts in keeping this forum active and engaged - its work is gradually changing the perception of heritage throughout Europe. I would like to reiterate how these annual meetings provide an invaluable forum for Ireland, and other nations, to exchange views and information on our shared passion - our heritage – whether it is its archaeology, architecture or landscape.

I wish to take this final opportunity to congratulate you on the achievement of reaching this milestone. In my capacity as Minister, with responsibility for built heritage and culture, I look forward to working on issues of mutual interest to all of us for the benefit of built environment and how we can maintain and conserve it for generations to come. I trust you will have an enjoyable visit to Trinity College and a successful final day of proceedings tomorrow.

I wish Switzerland and Mr. Martin well as he takes over the chair of the EHHF troika and we all look forward to another successful year ahead for EHHF as it continues to stimulate debate among the Heads and be a mutual source of inspiration. I hope you have a pleasant dinner and wish you well for the remainder of the forum proceedings. Go raibh maith agaibh.

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